

Four Mile Hill

By TONY KELSO

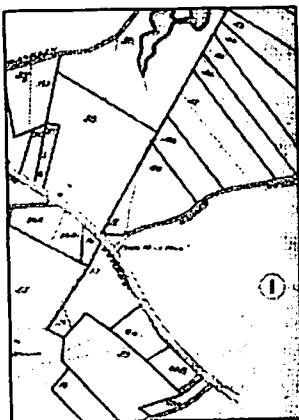
*"...hired a cart to cart her 'round
from four mile hill to Tarkiln town."*

This saying was an old 18th century rhyme from a ballad, but today very few people know where Four Mile Hill is in West Duxbury.

Four Mile Hill is the hill near Osborn's store, as you head along Route 53/Summer St. The crest of the hill is at the intersection of Route 53 and Cross St. The hill got its name since it was four miles to Duxbury village, four miles to Kingston, four miles to Pembroke and four miles to Marshfield.

Four Mile Hill probably was named and noted as a landmark from the constant traffic between Plymouth and Boston that flowed through that western part of Duxbury. Today, modern high speed Route 53 traffic barely notices the hill. But the stagecoaches of the 18th and 19th centuries must have struggled up that sandy hill, as it is one of the few changes in elevation in the whole area.

Summer St. and Route 53 were part of the main travel route that was used even earlier than 1620. Originally that route and Four Mile Hill were part of what was known as the Bay Path, leading north to the Massachusetts Bay settlements and Boston. Later, this route was called the Plymouth road or the Boston road, depending on which way you were traveling.



Names & Places

At the foot of Four Mile Hill is Valley Street, which branches off Route 53 and runs through a valley. The street was originally part of the Cedar Swamp Way because it leads into Pembroke and eventually to the Great Cedar Swamp there. It is Phillip's brook that creates the valley and the hill in that part of West Duxbury. Phillip's brook seems to have been named for King Phillip, as

legend has it that he and other natives would walk the path from the Pembroke ponds to the coast and use the spring that helps water Phillip's brook.

In May 1894 a very bad forest fire began when someone was burning brush on a cranberry bog near Four Mile Hill. The fire leapt Summer Street at Four Mile Hill and burned both sides of the road all the way up to Tarkiln and down Birch St. to the Pembroke line. There were very strong winds that day and it was only a fortunate change in the wind direction at sunset that sent the fire back onto the burned area so that then it could be controlled. The fire burned an area of about 3,000 acres that was 3 miles long and 1/2 of a mile wide. This 1894 fire recalls the intense fire recently in the 1990s that burned along the electric power lines in that same area.

Nearby Four Mile Hill was an area with two great old names. Around 1900 the valley of Phillip's brook that runs below Franklin St. on the east side, which is now mainly the Trout Farm conservation land, was known as "Happy Valley" or "Skunks Misery." No reason is known as to why it was happy to some but a misery to skunks.

Just past the intersection of Route 53 and Valley St. the old Whiting Milk distributor building stood until the 1970s. On this same site was an old tavern and store known as the Ruth Delano tavern. This place served the stagecoaches that ran that route in the 18th and early 19th centuries and climbed Four Mile Hill. After 1845, the tavern was moved across the street and its pitched roof eventually replaced by a flat one. The tavern building was torn down about 1967.

So as you zip along Route 53 at 40 miles per hour past Osborn's store and easily glide up and over Four Mile Hill, give a thought to the four miles to Duxbury, Pembroke, Kingston and Marshfield. What a relief it must have been for those long gone horses and coaches to know it was only four miles to somewhere in any direction after reaching the crest of that sandy hill on their long way to or from Boston.